

P R E S S   R E L E A S E

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**Williams College Museum of Art Presents  
Manifestos: American Dreams  
and Their Founding Documents**

January 19 and ongoing

Williamstown, Mass. — The Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) is proud to become the temporary home of Williams College's collection of documents relating to the founding of the United States of America. Normally on display in the Chapin Rare Book Library, the collection includes extremely rare early printed copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States as well as important copies of the Articles of Confederation, the Bill of Rights, and the Federalist, among others. These documents will be on view at WCMA during the college's renovation of Stetson Hall and the Chapin Library, which should be completed in the summer of 2011.

The Founding Documents will be shown within **American Dreams**, a presentation of American Art from the museum's collection. WCMA's American Art collection is renowned for its representation of the history of American art from colonial times to the present and includes works by John Singleton Copley, Thomas Eakins, Edward Hopper, Benjamin West, and Grant Wood. The documents will shed new light on works that take American government as their theme such as the series of studies by Elihu Vedder (1836-1923) painted for the

Library of Congress in 1896. Vedder's series visually depicts the lessons of good and bad government addressed in the original founding texts.

Presenting the Founding Documents as “manifestos” of a new type of government, the exhibition will present other documents from Chapin Library that also served as declarations of new beliefs or institutions. For example, sermons by Reverend Samuel Cooper will be shown with the portrait of that revolutionary preacher by John Singleton Copley, a friend but also a loyalist who would relocate to England before the start of the Revolutionary War. The Last Will and Testament of Ephraim Williams, Jr. advocating the founding of “a free school” will be displayed with the anonymous *View of Williams College Looking East* from 1847-51, showing the outcome of that declaration. The Chapin Library copy of the Emancipation Proclamation will be shown with the *Bust of Abraham Lincoln* by Sarah Fisher Ames done from life in 1864-66.

This display of “founding” documents of all kinds within an exhibition of American art creates a dialogue between picture and text, American art and American history, and the individual and institutional change. Over the next few years, the Founding Documents will be seen within changing exhibitions that highlight a variety of issues suggested by these new juxtapositions.

### **The Founding Documents include:**

The Declaration of Independence (Philadelphia: Printed by John Dunlap, July 4, 1776), one of twenty-six known copies of the first printing of the Declaration as issued by the Continental Congress, preceding by one month the ceremonial signed manuscript copy now at the National Archives;

The British Reply to the Declaration of Independence (Viscount Admiral Richard Howe (1726-1799) and General William Howe (1729-1814)), one of only six copies known to survive of a reply to the Declaration by King George III's official representatives in North America;

The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union (Lancaster, Pa.: Francis Bailey, 1777), one of nine surviving copies of the official first printing of the Articles, preserved in its original wrappers;

The Constitution of the United States (Philadelphia: Dunlap and Claypoole, 1787), Committee of Style draft on four leaves, one of fourteen surviving copies (of sixty) from the Constitutional Convention of 1787 with annotations on the printed side recording actions in the final days of debate, and "Objections to This Constitution of Government" on the reverse, by George Mason of Virginia;

The Bill of Rights, House of Representatives draft version (New York: T. Greenleaf, August 24, 1789), one of three known copies of the official printing, setting out the seventeen articles passed by the House before consideration by the Senate;

*Acts Passed at a Congress of the United States of America* (New York: Childs and Swaine, 1789), the twelve articles passed by Congress for consideration by the States (the first and second were not ratified), as given in the first printed Acts of the U.S. Congress;

*The Federalist* (New-York: J. and A. M'Lean, 1788), a First edition, presented to George Washington by Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, with Washington's signatures and bookplates.

## **Programming**

### **The Declaration of Independence and the British Reply**

Friday, July 4

Join us to hear actors from the Williamstown Theatre Festival as they read the Declaration of Independence and the British Reply. This Williamstown tradition takes place outside of the museum following the Williamstown Parade. The Founding Documents of the United States of America will be on view at WCMA in the exhibition **Manifestos: American Dreams and Their Founding Documents**.

### **Summer Gallery Talk Series**

Through July and August, curators and educators lead an array of summer gallery talks on the museum's permanent collection and current exhibitions.

Tuesday, July 15 at 2:00 pm

"Founding Fathers and Their Model American Sons"

Nancy Mowll Mathews, Eugenie Prendergast Senior Curator of 19th and 20th Century Art and Lecturer in Art

**Williams College Museum of Art**

The Williams College Museum of Art is open Tuesday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. Admission is free and the museum is wheelchair accessible. Contact: Suzanne A. Silitch, Director of Public Relations and External Affairs, 413.597.3178.